

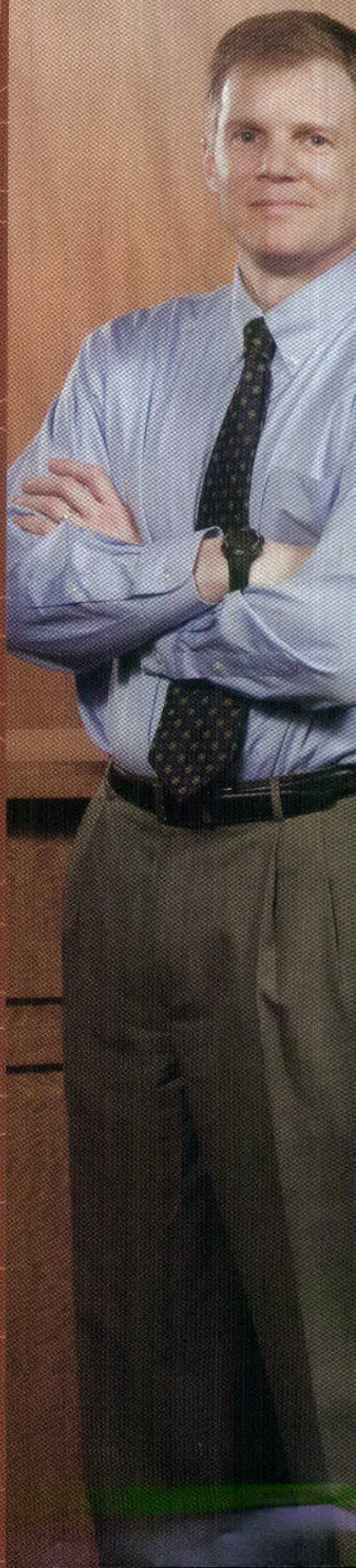
A Matter of Principals

Administrators have much to gain from learning how technology can be used effectively in education, but often are left out of professional development programs. Two initiatives are intent on remedying that. By Geoffrey H. Fletcher

SCOTT MCLEOD SAYS the great sin in the way professional development is provided in this country is one of omission. On his blog, McLeod, an associate professor in the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies at Iowa State University and the coordinator of the department's Educational Administration Program, writes, "Most of our school leaders have received no training whatsoever when it comes to 21st-century schooling."

It is not totally their fault, he says. Few higher-ed programs for administrators even have a course dealing with digital technology, and if they do, the course generally covers basic software, not leadership. Neither school districts nor professional organizations offer workshops in the area either. As a result, no movement can be made toward 21st-learning environments: When leaders are clueless about technology and the impact it can have in classrooms, they are powerless to change their school or district into one that provides tech-enabled instruction for students.

Asked if there is any hope, McLeod, who also serves as director of the University Continuing Education Association's (UCEA) Center for the Advanced Study of Technology Leadership in Education (CASTLE) at Iowa State, the nation's only facility dedicated to the technology needs of school administrators, points to programs under way at **Chicago Public Schools** and in the state of Maine that both provide ongoing and structured opportunities for principals to learn and share experiences and support each other. "They have different approaches for different purposes," McLeod says, "but both are trying to help principals understand the power of technology so that their schools can move into the 21st century." ▶





THE CHICAGO WAY Gerald Beimler (right) with two participants in the Principal Technology Leadership Institute, John Price (left) and Shawn Jackson

Chicago: Informed Decision-Making

As Shawn Jackson, principal of Chicago Public Schools' K-8 **Spencer Elementary Technology Academy** says, "There is a lot of professional development for teachers, but they were leaving us principals out."

Five years ago, Gerald Beimler, the district's director of IMPACT (Instructional Management Program and Academic Communication Tool) training in the Office of Information and Technology Services eLearning, set out to remedy that as one of the first undertakings of the then newly formed department. He wanted to bring principals together to provide them an overview of what technology can do for their schools.

More than 100 of Chicago's approximately 650 principals took Beimler and his group up on the offer of a two-day workshop, and at the end of the workshop, the principals said they

Jackson is one of the participating Chicago principals. He describes himself as "generally tech savvy," but thought he could use some additional support in working with technology, so he enrolled in the institute. One tool he has learned to use with great enthusiasm and effectiveness is Google Docs, a document-sharing application. Once Jackson learned to use its survey capability, he knew he had acquired the means to more informed decision-making. "I realized the power I now had for making better decisions based on real data and feedback from faculty," he says.

After his walk-through, Jackson began to put together his budget for the next year. He used Google Docs to poll his faculty on which tools they felt they would use—clickers, document cameras, projectors, etc.—and how often they would use them, imported the results into a spreadsheet, and instantly

"I want to know more about what kids should be doing with technology. I am skeptical of all the technology silver bullets out there and want to know how to make good decisions about buying technology products."

wanted some professional development for themselves. Thus, the Principal Technology Leadership Institute was born.

"We want principals to develop a vision for technology integration in their school building, use multiple measures of data to drive decision-making, and improve their technology skills and knowledge," Beimler says, outlining PTLI's goals. He also hopes that through attending the institute, principals will familiarize themselves with the national educational technology standards set forth by the International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE)—all the while getting some local academic credit for their participation. The principals meet quarterly for face-to-face sessions and are assigned to small study groups to complete their homework. Some study groups meet in person, but a few are incorporating online tools for their meetings.

Chicago Public Schools developed the content jointly with ISTE and continues to use ISTE's tech-savvy "eMentors" as cohort leaders who conduct the face-to-face meetings and monitor the online responses. "Our e-learning people host face-to-face homework sessions and study halls to assist participants in creating and posting things like the vision statements they create," Beimler says.

As assigned to do by the institute, the principal conducts a walk-through of his building to assess the extent to which technologies are being used and what they are being used for. He talks with faculty members and media specialists about what kinds of tools they might need and how often they might use them. Using that information, he creates a technology vision, shares it with his cohort, and receives feedback from the ISTE eMentor and his peers in the program.

got back data he could use to make good purchasing decisions. The online survey also revealed that some of the teachers who already had these tools had not received any training on how to use them—a dangerous oversight. As a result, Jackson made technology training for teachers a budgetary priority.

When he had an open house, Jackson again put his Google Docs acumen to work. He used the tool to create an online survey for parents, and asked all who attended to come through the computer lab and fill it out, providing him with another mechanism for parental feedback.

Jackson says that attending PTLI has done more for him than just hone his vision for his school. His understanding of Google Docs has allowed him to create online surveys that, because they are done anonymously, gather more honest and frank feedback. More importantly, he is modeling the use of technology, showing his faculty there's value in it. "Those faculty members who have not used technology see me using it," he says. "They then feel more inclined to use it."

John Price, principal of **Audubon Elementary School**, a Chicago preK-8 math, science, and technology magnet school with an enrollment of about 450 students, also participates in PTLI. Price says he joined PTLI because he wanted to be more tech-savvy.

"There is the implicit question of how this technology would work in my school and maybe with my kids, but I want to know more about what kids should be doing with technology," he says. "I also want to be more tech-savvy about purchasing. I am skeptical of all the technology silver bullets out there and want to know how to make good decisions about buying technology products." ▶

Maine: Decoding Geek Speak

Mike McCarthy, principal of **King Middle School** in Portland, ME, recalls one statement distinctly from a meeting with former Gov. Angus King, the initiator of the Maine Learning Technology Initiative (MLTI) 1-to-1 computing program, launched in 2001 with an attendant professional development component:

"This program is about learning, not about technology," the governor said. "While we learn about technology applications in our professional development program, we are all thinking about what this application can mean for kids."

MLTI had an early emphasis on providing training for both principals and teachers, but the principal component was "not sustained," according to Jeff Mao, learning technology policy

want for teachers. I need to turn to a tech integrator to work directly with the teachers when they need it."

McCarthy says that the sessions have not made him an expert, but they have made him aware of what can be done with the technology. "I have smart people I can turn to, like my technology integrator to coach my teachers on using the applications," he says. Unfortunately, all schools in Maine do not have a technology integrator—yet.

Frank H. Harrison Middle School in Yarmouth does, however, and his name is Mike Arsenault. His principal is Bruce Brann, who values the sessions in the MLTI training program for keeping him up to speed on the applications that are put on the computers the state has issued to the schools. "I go back to

"We are not interested in students just using technology. We want them fully engaged. There's a difference."

director at the Maine Department of Education. "We are revitalizing it now to revisit our middle school principals, who have had the 1-to-1 laptop program for a few years now, and because MLTI is moving into our high schools."

The program brings Maine's principals together twice a year for either a half day or a full day, in clusters based on the counties they work in. During the sessions, staff from Apple, the supplier for the 1-to-1 program, demonstrate new applications that have been or will be installed on the computers. MLTI staff help with administrative and logistical issues, and members of both staffs discuss different ways these applications can be used with students.

Mao has made a point of informing principals about the SAM-R model for tech integration. SAM-R stands for the four steps that teachers go through in integrating technology into their classrooms: substitution, augmentation, modification, and redefinition. Mao says it's important for principals to understand the SAM-R model so they and their teachers can have a common vocabulary when discussing what goes on in the classroom. Importantly, the model does not label teachers; it labels practices, allowing principals to avoid making value-laden statements. Mao also wants his principals to be wise enough about technology so they can be smart about their purchases, "so they don't have to defer to the tech guy all the time. They can translate geek speak."

An important aspect of the Maine model is the support it provides for principals. Principals bring with them to the semiannual sessions their technology integrator or a lead teacher who is knowledgeable about using technology with students, along with their media center director. The sessions always provide time for job-alike groups, where principals meet with their peers; library media specialists and technology integrators do the same.

"The day-to-day operation of the school is overwhelming," says Jeff Rodman, principal at Maine's **Middle School of the Kennebunks**. "I can't do all the professional development I

school and talk with Mike about specific ways different teachers can use these applications in the classrooms," Brann says. "We are not interested in students just using technology," Arsenault says. "We want them fully engaged. There's a difference."

Arsenault explains the difference by citing a school science project involving the study of flowers. Rather than demonstrate their learning through a test—labeling the parts of flowers and answering short-answer questions about pollination—Harrison students design their own flowers. They can create a 3-D model of a flower, or use different technologies to design one. "We don't tell kids to use one tool or another—PowerPoint or iWork or iMovie; part of the assignment is to pick an appropriate tool."

Some students have used iWork to create a kind of flipbook depicting their flowers reproducing. Others use iMovie or other animation tools that can be found on the web. Arsenault says one

↑links

Apple
www.apple.com

Google Docs
<http://docs.google.com>

International Society for Technology in Education
www.iste.org

Maine Learning Technology Initiative
www.maine.gov/mlte

Principal Technology Leadership Institute
http://elearning.cps.k12.il.us/programs_ptli.shtml

UCEA Center for the Advanced Study
of Technology Leadership in Education
www.schooltechleadership.org

FOR MORE ON HOW

principals use technology, see
Drill Down, page 50.

student designed a flower that looked like her iPod, and then created a video showing how these iPod flowers—and real flowers—pollinate. “That is engagement,” he says. “She has transferred her learning about flowers to create new knowledge.”

These kinds of experiences for students come about because Brann understands what applications are available and how they can be used, and he can rely on Arsenault and others to support teachers in using them. “There are experts throughout the building,” Brann says. “We have created a collaborative culture where everyone helps each other out.”

So is the effort working? Is providing technology training to principals having positive effects? Both Mao and Chicago’s Beimler think so. One of Mao’s indicators is attendance, and he likes what he sees: The teachers from schools whose principals are participating in MLTI’s professional development are coming to more sessions themselves, which Mao believes is a direct result of the interest their principals are showing in learning about technology integration.

What’s telling for Beimler is the interest in the program shown by other district administrators. With its former CEO, Arne Duncan, having left to become the US Secretary of Education, Chicago is in the midst of some administrative restructuring. A question has arisen: Does information tech-

nology services own professional development? With broader departments such as administrative support and curriculum

showing interest in claiming control over it, this indicates to Beimler that the whole organization sees the program’s value.

Both the Maine and Chicago programs aim more to create a support structure for leaders than teach them technology skills. “My job,” says McCarthy from Maine, “is to make sure there are enough staff and resources and that they are used correctly.”

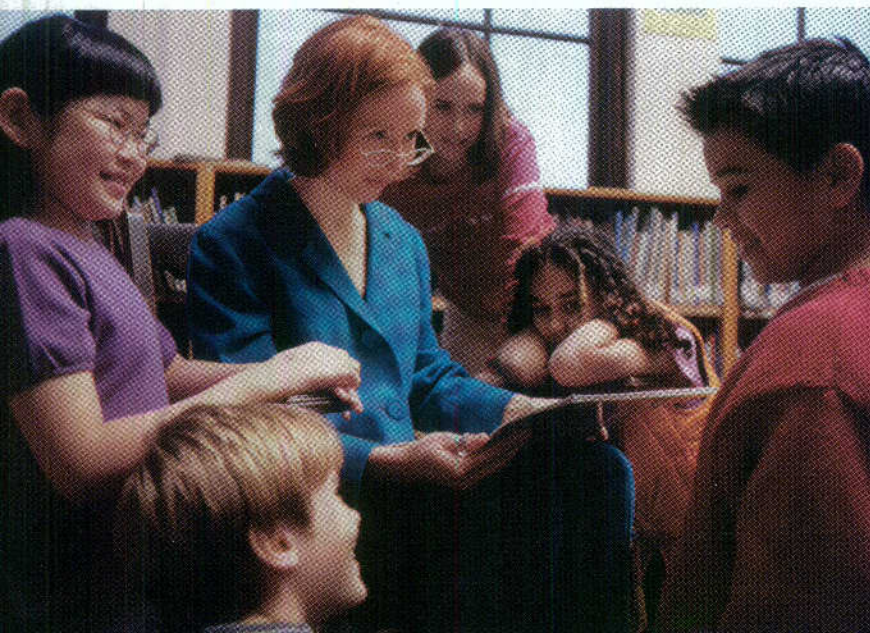
Rodman at the Middle School of the Kennebunks follows up on that, explaining that professional development helps leaders become aware of the possibilities: “I am not an expert, but I get people to realize that they need to change and use technology in conjunction with other research about education, such as brain development. I am looking for transformation of schooling, and I think we are getting it.” **THE**

Geoffrey H. Fletcher is editorial director of T.H.E. Journal.

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